

# Learning Resources Center Collin County Community College District CENTRAL PARK CAMPUS McKinney, Texas 75070

76 Caprice Classic by Shellie McCullough

1

**Shine** by Claire Shipman

2

This is only a test by Pamela Elaine Blair

Miriana's Attitude by Andy Lai

3

3:27 AM by Cameron Sells

inevitability by Molly Boyce

**Untitled**by Sherry Dickson

5

simmer the pot by Molly Boyce Untitled by Sherry Dickson

6

Reflection of Innocents by Elaughn Green

N

7

The Art of Negritude-Personal Opinion Essay by Sydney Portilla - Diggs

8 • 11

A Binary Deficit's Thinking Disorder by Greg Sherp 12

New Perspective by Paul Bellah

The Real Story by Anndria J. Webb 14

Lucky #7 by Shellie McCullough

> Rebel Portrait by Andy Lai 15

The Sandman by Charlotte Stevens

S

N

**Untitled Series**by Sherry Dickson
16

**Serenity** *by Kim Mladjen* 

One Step Out of Time by Stephlan Nguyen Han

> Sake Set by Clarice Dorst

Three Seasons of Eve by Clarice Dorst 17

> the river by Molly Boyce

Cherry Willow by Claire Shipman

House White by Nick Young
18

**Blackberries**by Beth Turner Ayers

The Tangerine by Dallie Clark 19

The Sistah Circle Has Curves by Pamela Elaine Blair **20** 

> Kamakazi by Miles Stoner

**Untitled**by Sidney Portilla - Diggs

Francis by Nick Young **21** 

The Thin Red
Department Store Line
by Keith Tolleson
22 • 25

Sonata Pharmaceutical: 1 st Mvmt. by Cameron Sells

26

#### FORCES

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# 76 Caprice Classic

Not rust colored paint but actual Rust streaked down the side of My very first car with the tan dashboard cracked by sunlight, Side mirrors big as kidneys which filtered fear from other drivers' eyes that I would move the sheer power of my v-8 engine into their lane. The squeaking chassis croaked out a rhythm To keep time with the 8-track player and teenage hormones in the front and back seat of my 1-track mind

full frontal driving wasn't on my naked agenda life is an adventure when there's more under the hood than behind the wheel which was reaffirmed by my car at every right turn where my horn would honk in sheer audacity and desperation because attention getters like that work every time reflects my mind's eye rearview mirror who remembers a face without fear and dry river bed wrinkles where laughter once ran like water which flowed over iron bones

now brittle and rusty with snap, crackle, pop something always breaks there's no warranty on kidneys and I know I'm not a kid anymore so stop reminding me I'm a little rusty, this vehicle can still get you where you're going! I mean, so what I can't drive past groups of neighborhood boys anymore with horn honking, radio blaring and blame it all on the car that in its old age needs the attention Shellie McCullough

# Shíne



I would vote you into office if you would only run Run for office or run for the hills You've got me either way

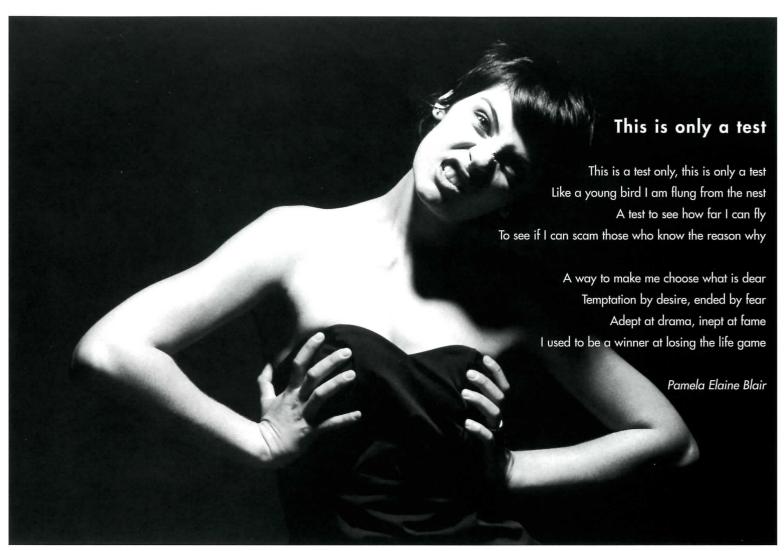
Bright eyes
Though you're hard to see
I think you just might be
my very own hesitating beauty



You're like a cowl covering me
Which no one else can see
I've grown used to this feeling
And I don't mind its being unrequited
Tagging along behind me daily.

Stepping on my heels and whistling in my ear, mild rebukes that turn my mouth up at the corners.

Claire Shipman



Miriana's Attitude by Andy Lai

#### 3:27 AM

#### 3:27 AM.

I'm trapped in a cloud of cheap bourbon and pine trees.

I've wandered in this place for days or years or half an hour.

My eyes burn with tears that ran out three beers ago.

I was trapped in the backyard for at least seventy-seven minutes.

#### 3:27 AM.

At some point the screen door gave way under my misguided bulk.

The hinges cried out in agony, pleading for mercy not coming.

I'd stolen through the darkened kitchen

Tile catching pale strands of moonlight like ivory spaghetti.

Warped and squiggly and infinitely beautiful.

The bottle's neck nearly shattered in my white knuckled fist.

There was no one there to care.

#### 3:27 AM.

The box had been full at some time before now.

Full of love and romance and hope and faith and trust.

Now it was almost empty.

It had been a secret treasure chest, now it was just a beat up shoebox.

#### 3:27 AM.

I'd started with the letters we'd written.

Crinkling whispers uttered a thousand miles distant

Their melodious crumpling and tearing like a bittersweet cacophony.

The matches snapped and sizzled in an almost erotic flash.

My flesh came alive with the memories of kisses and embraces.

My stomach turned to stone, my tongue to ash.

The little flame kissed those pages with as much love as I kissed her.

#### 3:27 AM.

I started up that bonfire and burned the bitch in blazing effigy.

I danced around it half-crazed with fear, hate, loss, betrayal, and a shot of vodka.

Ok, maybe two shots of vodka. Fine, it was the whole bottle.

In my midnight revels, I turned again to my tinderbox, ready to spend the last of its fuel.

The lumps that hung from my wrists pawed weakly at its contents.

There was nothing left. Instantly I was sober.

I danced a new dance, one fueled by desperation.

Stomping on the flames fighting back the ochre tide consuming all I loved.

#### 3:27 AM.

I saved most of one picture.

It was all I had left and I cursed the man who first brewed barley and hops.

I found more tears, hidden somewhere in my shoe or fingertips.

I'd thought I'd cried every last one, but a flood poured out fresh and violent.

I cried, wishing I hadn't made those flames rise up from Hell.

When I used up all those tears I'd hidden, I just sobbed, cold and alone under the pines.

Everything was gone except this one picture. It would have to do.

It was all that was left.

#### 3:28 AM.

Cameron Sells

# inevitability

how could we begin again when there was still pain and death and silence and war –

yes, war,
war so imminent
it belched and crowed
from tall, gray mountains
into small rooms
only big enough for
human hearts;

and peace could not stop it, eradicate it, nor negate the need for war's thirsty greed –

sons, wives, daughters, and husbands decaying the ground with shallow graves and ruthless right, today's heroes abandoned for tomorrow's glory; for who heeds history's unending lesson of power, snide treason, and blood split for a smitten race –

blind as they be, yearning for sweet promises in autumn's dark gloom under heavy apple tree, creating a fearful enemy out of the friends we only now make.

Molly Boyce

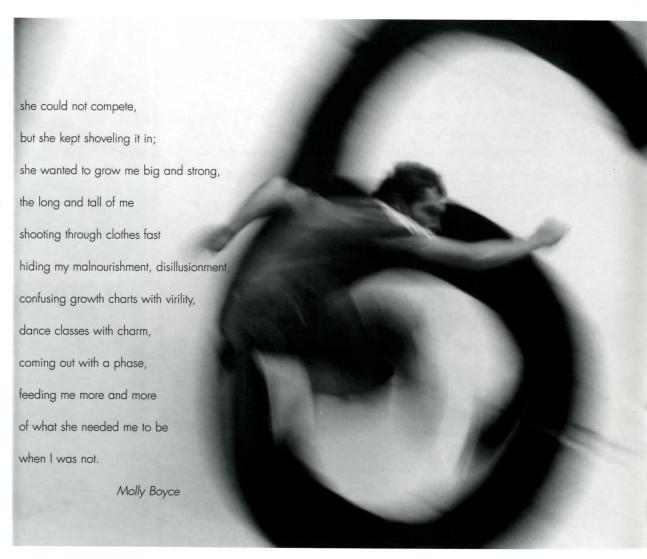




Untitled by Sherry Dickson

# simmer the pot

gruel it was, though she called it soup with its thick spices and dark sauce, and it stuck to my bones the stuff that would grow hair on my chest; she wanted to make me a man from the inside out in those days filling me up with platitudes, beatitudes I would discard one day for I knew better than she what would enhance my nature a day at the park, a good book, a kiss on the cheek -



Untitled by Sherry Dickson



Reflection of Innocents by Elaughn Green

## THE ART OF NEGRITUDE-Personal Opinion Essay

by Sydney Portilla-Diggs

Not only was I
ignorant of the
meaning of the word
but also I had
no vestigial idea
how the other children
knew he was
referring to me.

he original title of this essay was "Black like Black." However, after reading Henry James' The Art of Fiction and heeding his admonishment to write from experience, I renamed and rewrote the essay to reflect what I know best, the art of being black. You will notice throughout this essay that I refuse to submit to the more politically correct term of African-American. In my opinion, you cannot dare to call yourself an African-American unless you know exactly what tribe in Africa your family comes from. Since I do not know, do not dare to call me African-American. On a personal note, my family came to America from France via Puerto

Rico and St. Croix. The other branch of my family is of German and American Indian descent. Obviously, someone in my ancestry came from Africa because when you mixed it all up in one family—I came out black. I digress—let me tell you about my first experience with the issue of race.

The race issue confronted me at an early age. I have a vivid memory of playing on the playground with a group of children. This was my first day in a new school; I was the new kid, and I was eager to please. An older boy ran past our little group and screamed out the word "nigger." Time stood still for me. I know many of you will find it next to impossible to believe this, but I had never heard that word before. Imagine my surprise when the other children informed me that I was the target of that hateful epithet. How was it, you may wonder, that I had never encountered the "n" word before? I can only state that my parents had never addressed the issue of race with me, and I had no idea that color was an issue. Color was no more significant to me than the differences in the clothing we chose to wear. Not only was I ignorant of the meaning of the word but also I had no vestigial idea how the other children knew he was referring to me. However, I know now that I was the only black child on the playground.

Because of this incident, my parents were forced to explain prejudice and racism to me. How do you explain prejudice to a child? How do you explain hatred? These are not rhetoric questions; somewhere out there, someone knows the answer because racism keeps rearing its ugly head generation after generation. My mother painted a grim picture of society; it resembled a tall ladder with equally spaced rungs. She explained to me that white people created this societal ladder to preside at the top and look down upon all people of color. Even some people of color, she told me, looked down upon other minorities. We, black people, were on the bottom rung of society. I have never forgotten that talk. I know now that prejudice can flow both ways.

nother aspect, I will attempt to address in the art of negritude is what is means to be black. Perhaps a better way to say this is to address the preconceived ideas of what black people should look like or sound like. Let me ask you this—what color is intelligence? What color is justice or freedom? What color is perseverance or determination? Or destiny? Or love?

If you can answer these questions for me, I can attempt to answer what black is supposed to be. I can tell you this—I am not the keeper of the knowledge of all things black-related. I cannot and will not speak for the entire race. In addition, I will not condone the practice of calling some white man to the carpet and expecting him to answer for his race. I cannot say something "black" on demand like a trained poodle Black is not a language. I have no proof that I am black. I just am.

I also have an early memory of attending an elementary school in a suburb of Houston. In retrospect, I realize that it was an all black school. It was there that I learned I

was not black enough. The other children didn't like me because I didn't act black. They laughed at the way I spoke and my use of

These are not

rhetoric questions;

somewhere out there,

someone knows the

answer because racism

keeps rearing its

ugly head generation

after generation.

Although I didn't
come to America
aboard a slave ship
or fight my way
out of a ghetto,
I wake up
black
every morning.

proper grammar. I've had my blackness measured by blacks and whites alike and was found lacking by both. Sadly, I watch as my own children experience the same treatment. At a college retreat, one of my daughter's white friends commented that my daughter was not really black. Was that meant to be a compliment? My daughter was highly offended. Even now, some of my black friends tell me that I am the whitest black woman they know. Was that meant to be an insult? There is something incredibly frustrating about having to defend my blackness to other black folks while dealing with the same racism they experience.

nce I dated a black man who didn't appreciate the fact that I had many white friends. He was

convinced that if I fully understood the black man's struggle, I wouldn't befriend whitey. What did he mean by the black man's struggle? I decided to question my son to discover if and when he knew that he was black. He said his color was revealed to him in the first grade. Although his friend Jordan informed my son that he was black, my son let Jordan know that he was not black but brown. This became a consistent argument between the two boys. My son liked to play with Jordan because he had the coolest toys. Young Jordan (who I believe is a politician in the making) used his toys as a negotiation tool. He told my son that if he wanted to continue to play with the toys he would have to admit that he was black. My son pondered the proposal for a while and posed one question. Do you mean black like brown or black like black? Jordan confirmed that when he said black, he meant black. My son shrugged and conceded. Okay, I'm black.

I wonder if at that moment all the other white first graders were disappointed that my son was not more radical in his convictions. Or were the other black first graders morally outraged that my son "sold out?" Where did my son rate on the shades of blackness scale?

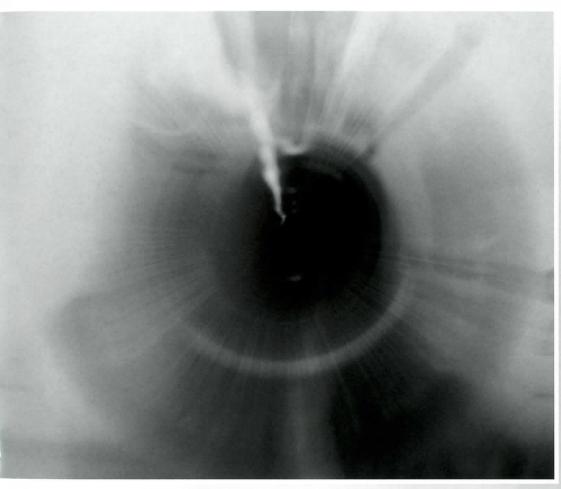
Did that moment of weakness in his racial identity resort in the forfeiture of the right to be called black? Had he been demoted to gray? This is what I know. Although I didn't come to America aboard a slave ship or fight my way out of a ghetto, I wake up black every morning. I fight for equal pay in corporate America. I fight to be taken seriously. I fight the stereotype. Here is a news flash. We are not all the same. I don't like watermelon, and I just learned to fry chicken two years ago. How can I prove that I am black without giving in to some stereotype? Why do I have to prove my blackness to other black people? If you ask me, that is the true black man's struggle, establishing a unique identity. Don't talk to me about the black man's struggle; I live it everyday.

he true art of negritude is to embrace your soul. From the moment I was conceived, I am who I was destined to be. However you add up my points on the shades-of-blackness-scale, there is nothing anyone can do to change what God has created me to be or the race I will pass on to my children. Don't question my blackness—find your own. Don't question who I am—find yourself. Don't categorize me—I am unique. In my soul, I know who I am. I am a black woman.

#### A BINARY DEFICIT'S THINKING DISORDER

Static Maybe the rabbit ears need adjustment Static WARE Static VAS Static Static Static Static Static Buzz Static Static Wuz Static Static Static Static Static Static Static Static ls Is Is Static Static Static Static Static ... Static MARCOcStatic Static POLO Static POLOStatic Static Static MARCO tatic Static eye Static Static Static Static Static THINK Static i Static THINK Static Maybe the rabbit ears need adjustment Static Static

Greg Sherp



New Perspective by Paul Bellah

# The **REAL** Story

I wrote this for the pro
Fessor is what I call him
Who attempted to understand me
Not even knowing me.

He thought he could heal me With what he thought was insight Not knowing he was simply On the outside... looking in.

Yeah, he heard me talking,
So he must have been close to the window,
And I can see the breath mark that he made.
But between the wind and the bending of trees,
The words must have gotten muffled some way

Because it wasn't a slap I longed to give.
I wanted to remove him completely
From my memory.
I wanted to go back and erase
Every moment of his existence ...in me.

I cried at the thought of choosing
The biggest mistake of my life,
And when the phone rings, or
When the house is too quiet,
It's a never-ending dream in the night.

I cry, can't sleep, can't dream, can't hope.
I wish I could feel my soul.
It's gone, my cause, I am the effect
Of love found and forever gone.

I knew and was told,
And anything else I could think of
Turned me in the opposite direction
But that thing, um, um,
I forget what they call it,
Kept telling me we had a great connection.

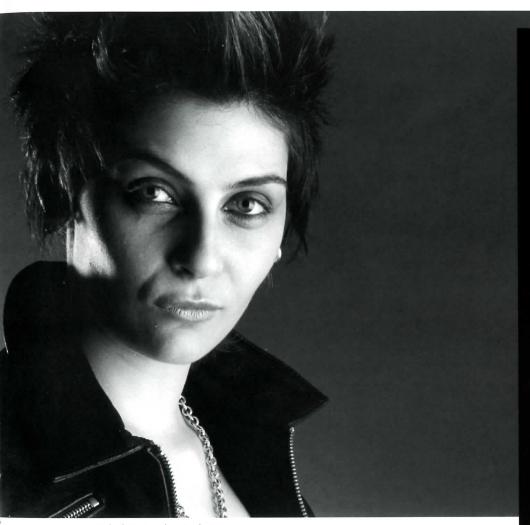
It wasn't. It's not. When will it stop?
I'm dreaming, but I never closed my eyes.
To keep me, there should have been
A bolt of lightning,
From the biggest mistake of my life.

Anndria J. Webb

# LUCKY #7

The teacher with her frazzled halo of hairdo heresy preaches, prophesizes how numbers are not coincidental like genetics, politics, or birthdays and me half-Jew girl born on the same day as Heinrich Himmler 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1974 to the present my days are numbered, enchanted celestial solutions, a moving mystery like Mann's Magic Mountain. Seven deadly sins are no accident of broken mirrors or crooked teeth crowded to the front of teacher's mouth ready for an argument against Algebra, but we're talking Pythagorean theorems and I don't have that kind of energy since the past 2 days my diet is water and Dexatrim, inspected by #7, expires in 2007 but by then I'll be all teeth, Auschwitz thin and I won't argue, it's no accident.

Shellie McCullough



Rebel Portrait by Andy Lai

# The Sandman

In that hazy place between sleep and awake
When daylight retreats for the dreamer's sake
Where the heavy mists swirl with dark evening air
Where visions are formed, whether foul, whether fair
At a crossroads where living and dead tend to meet
There tiptoes the sandman on quick, silent feet
Neither evil nor good, full of truth, full of lies
He is gentle and harsh, always cunning and wise.
Some nights up to mischief, sending goblins and ghosts,
Lurkers and death, all those things hated most
He'll send you through hell, turn your world upside-down

Turning sweet, content smiles to whimpering frowns
Reminds you of things you have tried to ignore
Or makes you relive things you've been through before.
But on other evenings his humor is high
He'll send you a song in a rainbow-filled sky
Victorious battles, all the gold on the earth,
A well-deserved kiss, life of happiness, mirth,
Unpredictable friend, unforeseeable foe
Cannot trust him or fear him, for sand he will throw
Regardless of who you are during the day
It's time for the sandman to come out and play.

Charlotte Stevens



Untitled Series by Sherry Dickson

# Serenity Caring words, to speak Sun peeks out from cloud-strewn skies Calm winds grace the deep

#### Sake Set by Clarice Dorst

# One Step Out of Time

I met Jess last week Just another week Splendor magnetic Love automatic

I met Jess today Heart, soul gone astray Why could we not be near No fewer than five golden tears

I meet Jess next week Lone tear gone acidic So far yet oh so near Once conquered our own fears

Stephlan Nguyen Han



Three Seasons of Eve by Clarice Dorst

One step out of time

Kim Mladjen

### the river

moody water, still, passionate, and warm touch of a kiss across the body flow of emotion from a soul eroding and uncovering as it swiftly flows back into the sea

at the edge, that rippling, tripling rage, that silent serpent of life winding earth through me cursing my destiny down dark caverns where the tide goes

on shallow bed
where reed and willow
sway their shadow's
sensual water sprite song
tangled in undercurrents
seductive and sweet
drawing me to its breast

Molly Boyce



House White by Nick Young

# cherry willow

I don't remember how it died, but I know it wasn't pretty. I don't remember if it was struck by lightning or shot in the heart. I remember the blossoms pink I think or maybe white. And they snowed down in the every which way wind, sticking to my little girl sweater and piling up in drifts against the chain link fence.

Does a tree have a solar plexus?

I swear I heard it scream
but it was low and drawn out.

Time is different for a tree.

Maybe that scream was just a gasp.

Damn him for that shot.

Damn god for that crack.

And damn me for never climbing as high as its branches would hold me.

Claire Shipman

# **Blackberries**

I pass by every day

The briar patch beckons me

As the warming air

Beckons the blossom

White flowers

Imprisoned by tangled vine

Thorned, twisted confinement

Protection for the seed

Blossom gives way

To a small knotty sphere

Red, on a jagged platter of green

Drawing from earth's bounty

Preparing the bounty of earth

The berry

Plump, reflective, black

Fruit of the tangled vine

My six-year-old hand

Reaches from my mind

To carefully pluck the treasure

And yet

My view comes through glass

My leather seat imprisons me

In today's reality

My mouth waters for Mama's jam

Beth Turner Ayers

# The Tangerine

In the purpling gray of early morning

you photograph me bent over

my essays and coffee -

and frame the scene to give me later.

You sit across from me,

a pale shard of daylight

on your cheerful palate of fruit.

For days and days you have loved me

in my uneasy bittersweet. But this morning,

when you lift a piece of half-mooned tangerine

to my mouth and place it

between my lips, the clean scent

on your fingers wraps

around the citrus and seals my hope.

Dallie Clark

# The Sistah Circle Has Curves

Rocky hips wider than any gulf of the ocean

Jazzy smooth silk with motion

Ebbing questions of who slept with Mac

Flowing answers with secrets of who slept with Pat

Maybe it's the bounce of our breasts

Conversations from A to Z

A cup of coffee or a mug of tea

One lump or two?

Just how much sugah can you stand?

Gurl lemme tell you what's up wit yo man!

Red lips drip vows loaded calories

One diet plan could break the circle sighs, of ooh baby please

Curly, nappy, hair braided, weaved or straight

And we wonder why we can't lose the weight

Bulging vulgarities, belly rolls and ripples

Gin and Vodka drunk from moist nipples

Backsides adorned with skirts too tight

As divas with stories we have earned the right

The curves of other mothers, sisters and aunts

A circle that binds us with all of its haunts

Sizes 8 to 22 small medium and large

The circle docks on Saturday with the help of a barge

We groove to music that can lull and lead

Our heads held high with our eyes on the tease

We don't hold back, we won't be put down

The sistah circle has spread from down to uptown

Prim, and proper even straight laced

Light skinned tone with egg on our face

Hershey hues that melt in the sun

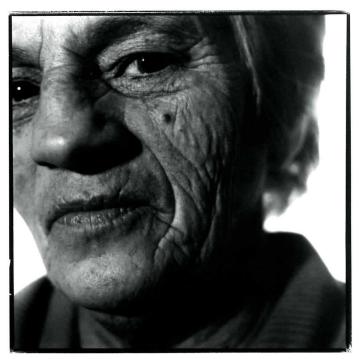
Curves like a roller coaster that can make a man run

Pamela Elaine Blair

# Kamakazí

It's me, only. It's only me. I stand on my own feet. So it gets lonely A home body, Picture an alone me. Writing these rhymes in the zone and deep. Mixing Pac with Poe to make poetry. I'm Pessimistic, So Optimistic, is how I don't see. And I don't look for opportunities That won't be. I feel sometimes that No one knows me. So Hold me with comfort so you can ease the worst, Cause I'm constantly working. Feeling worthless so for a purpose, I'm permanently searching. But it gets too tough, And I can't bear this non-stop controversy. Lord, have mercy on me! Cause to you my vision's blurred, But to me I see perfectly.

Miles Stoner



Francis by Nick Young

#### UNTITLED

The moon
Is an unloved woman.
Pools of hot tears,
Like acid, have burned craters
Into her face.
And my sadness, like hers,
Has brought me to this place.
I will be with her
Soon.

Sydney Portilla-Diggs

#### THE THIN RED DEPARTMENT STORE LINE

by Keith Tolleson

"No one can find
those robot
dinosaur things.
This is our one shot,
and if you can
do this, you'll be the
most amazing man
ever."

I don't remember exactly when I gave up on preserving my dignity, but I do know that what I'm doing now is the clearest indicator that I have none left. There's no good reason for a 46 year-old man to be standing outside of a department store at 4:50 a.m. the morning after Thanksgiving, or at least no good reason that I can think of. My wife, on the other hand, had me convinced last night that, by standing in front of a mall in sub-freezing temperatures with 150 middle-aged women, I could become a hero; "No one can find those robot dinosaur thingies. This is our one shot, and if you can do this, you'll be the most amazing man ever."

or a brief moment I did feel kinda like I was serving a noble cause. Maybe it was a bit heroic. After all, my kid would be the only one on the street with an E-Rex, and I would be the envy of all the frustrated parents whose kids kept asking them why Santa brought Jonathan an E-Rex but not them. Maybe it would teach

that jackass next door to work a little harder on giving his kids what they actually want for Christmas instead of spending so much time trying to turn house decorating into a damn contest every year. That's what a hero would do. Then I thought about what my father would say if I'd dared to call myself a hero in front of him. He'd say, "Boy, until you've had a bullet lodged six-inches from your balls and still managed to take out eight Krauts, you don't know jack shit about what it takes to be a hero." And then he'd show me the wound.

ver the years, my father had made it a point to let me know that I didn't know jack shit about a lot of things. In fact, just yesterday he told me I didn't know jack shit about carving turkey, jack shit about serving the right amount of gravy that goes with mashed potatoes, and jack shit about how to time my channel changing during commercial breaks so we didn't have to miss any of the football game. My wife finds it all very

amusing. I could probably do without it. But, with my father's words in mind, I decided that the acclaim I might get from waiting in line for an E-Rex was not worth risking frostbite only to get mugged by a group of soccer moms once I'd gotten the toy. That wasn't heroic, I thought, it was just stupid. When I told this to my wife, however, she was slightly less than understanding and proceeded to describe plans for me that involved kitchen utensils and certain parts of my body as an alternative. I set my alarm for 3:00 a.m.

o here I am, almost two hours into my stay on the sidewalk in front of Silver Brook Mall, with about ten minutes to go before Walker's Department Store opens for its big Pre-Dawn Sale, and I'm starting to lose feeling in my toes. I'm 35<sup>th</sup> in line, sandwiched between Jean, a wiry blonde woman who's well into her second pack of cigarettes, and Pat, a woman around my age whose girth looks to be gaining on her height. The two women became fast friends when, around a guarter till four, they discovered that they shared the same obsession for Beanie Babies. "Are you a collector?" Jean asked, smiling to reveal a tremendous gap in her yellowing front teeth.

"No," I said flatly. The woman frowned, and then continued the conversation with her new comrade. Clearly my usefulness to her has now been relegated to my acting as a target for her smoky exhalations. Luckily, my nose has been stuffed up by the cold for a good while, and I can't smell a thing. Unfortunately I can't say the same for my hearing. I've had the unique pleasure of listening to the life histories of both women for the past hour. It seems that, aside from their common interest in Beanie Babies, Jean and Pat both have three children, all cesarean deliveries, followed by hysterectomies with complications. Both also had appendicitis as teenagers, and their

favorite TV show is Wheel of Fortune. Right now they're debating whether or not Pat Sajak wears a hairpiece, and I'm debating whether or not to get a handgun license.

I ith five minutes to go until Walker's officially opens, a manager comes out of the employee entrance to address the crowd. A stocky, balding man with a thick, black mustache and a unibrow, the look on his face is the same look natives

might have as they watch lava from an erupting volcano rush toward their village. His voice starts shakily, but soon develops a sense of command as he proceeds, "Ladies and Gentlemen if I could have your attention, those of you who are here for the E-Rex dinosaurs please form a line to your immediate left once you enter the store. There is only a limited supply, and we want to keep this as organized as possible. IN THE INTEREST OF FAIRNESS, PLEASE DO NOT CUT IN LINE!" He puts extra emphasis on that last part because the crowd is starting to buzz and making a slight push toward the door. Pat's stomach pushes into my back and I get closer to Jean than I'd like to be, discovering in the process that my sense of smell isn't as dulled as I'd originally thought.

The two women became fast friends when, around a quarter till four, they discovered that they shared the same obsession for Beanie Babies.

The store manager crosses himself and ducks through the employee door. There's another small push as a woman toward the front mentions that someone is coming to unlock the front door. "Let go of my shirt!" another woman yells. This is about to get crazy.

When the front door is unlocked, people begin to file inside in a fast, yet surprisingly organized, fashion. Maybe this isn't going to turn into the mayhem I thought it would. Behind me, Pat is getting restless, shifting her weight back and forth, and trying her best to see over me and around me into the store. Suddenly, a woman comes running from the back of the line and darts through the front door amidst a chorus of cries from the other women demanding she be

I'll figure out
what to do
for the kid later.
It'll be tough,
but maybe I can
still convince him
that there is a
Santa after all.

stopped. Two more women from the back then pass by, headed for the door. This, apparently, is the sign that Pat has been waiting for. She sidesteps me and begins to make her move, but her new best friend Jean steps out and shoves her to the ground, effectively ending their short-lived companionship. Pat rolls onto her back grabbing her ankle and wailing, but no one takes notice. The crowd has turned to watch Jean who has suddenly made a break for the door. Sensing that any effort to police the line ended with Jean's vigilantism, a mad rush for the store ensues, and I find myself caught helplessly in a wave of hairspray and cheap perfume pushing me through the entrance.

Once I'm thrust through the door, I almost slip on something and look down

to see a small woman with glasses collecting the spilled contents of her purse. I pick up her compact, which was under my foot. As I hand it back to her, she looks up at me with the expression of a cat that's been thrown into a cold swimming pool, defeated and untrusting. Regardless, she takes the compact and I rise and look to the back of the room where I see the store manager standing on a giant E-Rex display surrounded by three or four other employees and a sea of grabbing hands. I catch a glimpse of Jean pushing another woman to the ground. The manager is in a panic. Having abandoned any effort to differentiate who was in line first, he and the other employees are now simply throwing E-Rex dolls into the crowd, hoping merely to survive the ordeal at this point. Women are practically climbing on top of one another, money in hand, in what is becoming a borderline riot. I once again see the absurdity of a 46 year-old man enduring all this nonsense for a toy, and I turn and head for the door. I'll figure out what to do for the kid later. It'll be tough, but maybe I can still convince him that there is a Santa after all.

alking to the exit, I find more and more rational reasons to leave this store. Christmas has become too commercial; the boy would break the dinosaur on the first day; and, if he didn't break it on the first day, he'd be bored with it in a week. Besides, I wasn't much older than he is when I stopped believing in Santa Claus. Was I? As I reach the door, I think of my father again. I remember a story he told me a couple of years ago during the Christmas following my mother's death. He talked about the time I wanted a real cowboy costume, the kind with leather chaps and two six-shooter holsters, and a white shirt like The Lone Ranger's; "It was all you talked about for months. We had no choice but to buy you the damn thing." My parents ordered the costume from a catalogue weeks before Christmas, just to make sure it would get to the house on time. Then, two days before Christmas, they received a letter informing them that the company they'd ordered the costume from had folded, and no shipments would be going out. Rather than have me question the

existence of Santa Clause, my mother stayed up until 4:30 Christmas morning sewing the costume, making sure it was an exact replica of The Lone Ranger's. My father ended his story by saying, "Until you do everything you can to keep your kids' dreams alive, you don't know jack shit about what it takes to be a parent." I turn and walk to the back of the store.

he manager is still tossing E-Rex toys into the crowd as I make my way toward the melee. He appears to be on his last batch, and the fighting up front is becoming more and more furious. Mall security has finally arrived, but there's little they can do at this point. The police will be here soon, I figure, so I'd better work fast. I skirt around the edge of the crowd, trying to make my way behind the display where I hope to snag a doll from one of the floor-level employees. As I reach the linoleum walkway to the side of the display, I see Jean walking in my direction with an E-Rex in hand and a gaptoothed grin on her face. Looks like her brutality has paid off. She gets about five feet from me when out of nowhere a woman flies into Jean

knocking her over a rack of corduroy pants and onto the floor. It's Pat, who's obviously gotten her revenge. The two women tussle on top of a pile of corduroy and broken plastic hangers until a pair of security guards break up the fracas and take them away cursing and spitting at one another.

Just as I'm about to turn back to the display, out of the corner of my eye, I see part of an E-Rex box sticking out from underneath the pile of pants. Jean hadn't been able to collect the toy while she was being led off by security, and it is seemingly buried deep enough to escape notice by the other women, who are still focused on the display. I manage to remain undetected as I collect the toy, go through the line at the cash register, and head home. There will be no mugging today. My boy will believe in Santa Claus after all. I do know jack shit about being a parent. And no matter what my father says about bullets, or balls, or Krauts; I got an E-Rex, and right now, I'm a hero.

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